

City of Renton

2011 State Legislative Agenda



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City of
Renton



BASIC PREMISES

The City of Renton's positions on state legislation will reflect basic premises established by the Renton City Council over many years. These include the need to provide local elected officials maximum flexibility in addressing community needs; strong opposition to new or expanded mandates on local governments without adequate funding to support these programs, as required by State law (RCW 43.135.060); and the importance of maintaining local control, especially in areas such as local government taxation and financing, rights-of-way management and land use and zoning matters.

Additionally, during a time of economic uncertainty, and with the State facing operating budget shortfalls for 2011-2013 of \$5.7 billion or more, Renton asks lawmakers to maintain basic services such as public safety and criminal justice, and to be mindful of the impact to local communities of cuts to health and human services programs such as mental health and health care. The City is not making any new funding requests from the State's operating budget. The City urges lawmakers to refrain from further cuts to programs that are key to public safety, including auto theft prevention grants, municipal criminal justice monies and law enforcement academy funding. Renton also asks the Legislature to consider creative approaches to providing cities with additional efficiencies, cost-savings and flexibility. Renton will consider support for regulatory reform, easing liability burdens and legislation to reduce or eliminate unnecessary mandates.

PRIORITY ISSUES

Transportation Solutions

Renton continues to face major challenges with traffic congestion that comes with being at the crossroads of Interstate 405, Highway 167 and several other state highway corridors. This creates slowdowns and choke points that stifle the efficient movement of people and goods through the City, resulting in severe economic, family and quality of life impacts. The City asks legislators to remember that the I-405/SR 167 interchange remains the most congested interchange in the state and I-405 from Renton to Bellevue remains the most congested corridor in the state. Renton is joining the multi-stakeholder "Transportation Partnership" in the 2011 session to urge that the Legislature enact a new transportation investment package. The City requests that the core mission of "fixing the worst first" help guide investment decisions, and that a package should address not only the state highway system but key needs such as local roadways, freight mobility, transit and incentive-driven programs such as Commute Trip Reduction (CTR).

In the 2011 Legislative Session, the City of Renton will:

- ***Support authorization of managed lane approaches to funding I-405/SR 167 needs from Puyallup to Lynnwood:*** The City played a key role in 2010 in helping with House passage and Senate committee passage of **ESHB 2941**, which would have established a managed lanes program on I-405. While **ESHB 2941** did not pass, the Legislature appropriated funds that allowed the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to move forward with environmental work, continued design and "Expert Review Panel" analysis of a I-405 "High Occupancy Toll" lane (HOT Lane) project. In 2011, WSDOT will forward agency request legislation to call for construction of additional toll lanes that can help add desperately-needed capacity to the I-405 corridor. While the first deployment of HOT lanes is likely to be north of Bellevue, Renton seeks capacity additions and improvements as soon as possible at the I-405/SR-167 connector, as well as the two lanes of additional capacity on I-405 northbound and southbound between Renton and Bellevue. It is critical that tolling implementation is timed so that it is consistent with areas seeing specific improvements. The City also encourages the State to use its full faith and credit to help finance I-405 projects in order to maximize the investments and accelerate progress on the entire corridor.
- ***Investments in key state and local projects, freight mobility and transit:*** As the Legislature and the Transportation Partnership lay the groundwork for a possible comprehensive transportation revenue package in 2011, Renton asks lawmakers to support key needs, including:
 - \$3 million for the NE Sunset Boulevard Corridor Improvements Project (SR-900)
 - Dedicated freight mobility funding that would allow the Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board (FMSIB) to award \$5 million for the SW 27th Street/Strander Boulevard project between Renton and Tukwila
 - Direct distribution funds for local needs, local funding options, enhanced funding for the Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) grant programs and additional funding for transit and Commute Trip Reduction
 - "Complete streets" legislation that better enables cities such as Renton to make transit- and pedestrian-friendly investments along state corridors that run through local communities.

Fiscal Stability

Renton, like many other cities around the state, has been forced to make major budget reductions during the economic recession while still keeping core services intact. Through several cycles of cuts, the City has reduced its general fund spending by more than 12% over two years, instituted furlough days for employees, and reduced its work force by 94 employees to balance its 2009-2012 budgets, despite growing its population by one-third since 2008. With these major fiscal challenges in mind, Renton asks for the State Legislature's help to preserve key state revenue sources and current taxing authorities. In the 2011 Session, the City of Renton will:

- ***Team up with the Association of Washington Cities (AWC), counties and other local governments to protect state-shared revenues that are vital to cities:*** With a \$5.7 billion-plus state operating budget shortfall, some state-to-local revenue streams may be at risk. Renton asks legislators to consider how counter-productive it would be to cut local revenues that help cities maintain a commitment to public safety and assist with social services needs. Municipal Criminal Justice Assistance funds, Streamlined Sales Tax (SST) mitigation payments, auto theft and sex offender address verification funds, and other state-shared revenues, are critical to cities such as Renton.

Flood Control and Critical Upgrades to the Green River Levee System

Over the past two years, Renton and the other Green River Valley cities, along with King County, and in cooperation with multiple state and federal agencies, have made significant progress in repairing and stabilizing the Howard Hanson Dam to ease fears over flood damage that could have occurred with major winter storms. However, while progress with the Dam is encouraging, by no means are the Valley's problems solved. It remains critical to have the flood-protection levees along the Green River upgraded to meet Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) levee certification standards and be accredited to provide 100-year flood protection. FEMA is in the process of adopting new Flood Insurance Rate Maps that will map virtually the entire Valley as a flood zone, causing flood insurance costs to skyrocket, requiring more properties to have to purchase flood insurance, crippling economic development efforts and making it infinitely more difficult for businesses and property owners to develop and redevelop in the Valley. The new FEMA floodplain maps are showing more of the Green River Valley, including areas in Renton, as being in the 100-year floodplain. By upgrading the Green River levee system to FEMA certification standards, the areas behind the upgraded levees can be shown being protected and allow the floodplain maps to be revised to reduce the amount of 100-year floodplain area.

However, upgrading the nearly 20 miles of levees along the Green River Valley will be a lengthy, expensive process costing several hundred million dollars. Federal dollars for such levee work are scarce, and funding and utility and property tax rate-based efforts at the local level and with the King County Flood Control Zone District are not nearly enough to address the problem. It is of paramount importance that the State of Washington assists with this work. The Green River Valley is the largest industrial area in Washington State, the 2nd largest distribution hub on the West Coast and the 4th largest in the nation. Funding of these flood-related projects is critical to the health of an industrial valley that supports 40 million square feet of warehouse/industrial space, 1,800 businesses, 20,000 jobs and \$8 billion in taxable revenue.

In the 2011 Session, the City of Renton will:

- ***Strongly support a 2011-13 Capital Budget request for state assistance with levee upgrades:*** As part of an overall 10-year, \$15-million-per-year request by Valley cities and King County, Renton will support a 2011-13 capital budget request for \$30 million to upgrade levee segments in Kent, Tukwila and Auburn, particularly those segments which directly assist with protecting the City against flood impacts.
- ***Temporary relief to help King County Flood Control Zone District address the "levy suppression" problem:*** The King County Flood Control District, formed in 2007, helps the Valley communities with flood control and levee work along the Green River. But the District's 2011 funding is in question due to a phenomenon known as "levy suppression." Essentially, with declining property values causing property tax "millage rates" to rise, the property taxing districts in King County are very close to bumping up against the statutory \$5.90/\$1,000 combined property tax rate allowed for all taxing districts (cities, County, hospital/library/fire districts). That would imperil the funding for the Flood Control District, the most junior taxing district in the County. In 2011, King County will lead an effort to help protect the District, temporarily, from the property tax levy lid. Pending review of proposed legislation, Renton will support this request.

Economic Development and Infrastructure Funding

The City of Renton supports policies that help retain and create jobs and increase economic opportunity. Investing in infrastructure that addresses core community needs, and lays the groundwork for economic development, continues to be a high priority for the City. Renton will work in concert with the Association of Washington Cities and a coalition of other key stakeholders on options to address community needs and enhance its business retention and recruitment efforts.

In the 2011 Legislative Session, the City of Renton will seek support for:

- ***Sunset Area Community Investment and Revitalization:*** The City Council has adopted a Sunset Area Community Investment Strategy, developed with the Renton Housing Authority (RHA), the Renton School District (RSD) and the community to revitalize this area. The City has set aside \$1.5 million for infrastructure needs in the area and is dedicated to working with RHA, RSD and others to secure additional funding to revitalize the area. Potential strategies include the use of underutilized land, redevelopment of existing public housing, upgrade of public infrastructure, improvement of pedestrian linkages and enhancement of community services and amenities. The City of Renton strongly supports RHA's pursuit of \$4.5 million in state "Washington Works" workforce housing (Housing Finance Commission) for the Sunset Terrace redevelopment project, which will act as a catalyst for further redevelopment in the Sunset Area. The City also seeks \$3 million in transportation funding for safety and pedestrian improvements for the NE Sunset Boulevard Corridor Improvements Project (SR-900) and \$1 million for the Hillcrest Inclusive Playground, an accessible playground in this community that will serve the region.
- ***Assistance with revitalization of the West Hill/Skyway area:*** In August 2010, the Renton City Council voted to place on the February 2012 ballot the annexation of the West Hill/Skyway area between Renton and Seattle. The City is tremendously appreciative of the help the Legislature has provided to assist with the Growth Management Act-driven costs of taking on large annexation areas such as this one, through a state sales tax credit mechanism enacted in 2006 and extended and enhanced in 2009. Still, in the West Hill/Skyway area which is struggling with business closures, dealing with severe public safety and educational challenges, and suffering from deficient infrastructure, a gap of several million dollars per year must be closed in order for Renton to proceed with annexation efforts during a time of economic upheaval.

In 2011, in collaboration with King County, Skyway Solutions and the West Hill Business Association, Renton is supporting a \$2 million West Hill/Skyway capital budget request to build upon previous infrastructure investments in the business district along Renton Avenue. (Skyway Solutions fully supports the funding request but remains neutral on the topic of annexation.) This investment will help stimulate economic activity in this struggling commercial area, help close the City's funding gap and begin to help radically revitalize this community. The City also supports legislation which would relieve cities of the requirement to conduct expensive post-annexation census counts.

Strengthening the Aerospace Industry

As the first city to join the Aerospace Futures Alliance (AFA) and as a founding member of the Washington Aerospace Partnership, Renton strongly supports the efforts of both organizations to strengthen the aerospace industry across Washington. Priority issues for AFA include, among others: supporting tax policies that encourage the growth and long-term health of the industry; improving transportation infrastructure; enhancing training and education to support the aerospace workforce; and addressing rapidly increasing health care costs.

Renton has been proud to be the home of The Boeing Company for over 67 years. The first commercial jet, the Boeing 707, was made in Renton, and the best selling jets in history have been assembled in Renton ever since. Renton is now home to three of the company's six business units: Boeing Commercial Airplanes, Boeing Capital and Boeing's Shared Services Group. Boeing's Renton 737 operations account for nearly \$7 billion (2.7%) of Washington's Gross State Product, 10.7% of the state's exports abroad and over 45,000 direct and indirect jobs. Renton is also the home of a diverse array of aerospace suppliers and a municipal airport. The City is delighted by Boeing's announcement last September that it will increase production of the successful 737 jetliner from the current 31.5 planes per month (an all-time high for the company) to 38 planes per month by the second quarter of 2013. Renton will continue to support legislation that enables Boeing and other aerospace companies to thrive.

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